

First 5 LA Accountability and Learning L3 Report

on FY 2009-2015 Strategic Plan
Program Services, Activities,
and Expenditures



Champions For Our Children
www.First5LA.org

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Acknowledgments

First 5 LA would like to thank and acknowledge the First 5 LA Board of Commissioners for its leadership, guidance and dedication to the vision that all children in Los Angeles County be given a great start. This comprehensive evaluation report of all existing First 5 LA grantees and contractors and the Commissioners' direction and strategic planning have provided First 5 LA the opportunity to evaluate and document our accomplishments and areas that need improvement. By looking back, we are able to look forward to a bright future for our children.

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Executive Summary

Since 1998, First 5 LA has cast a broad and deep footprint on services to improve the health and development of young children and their families in L.A. County. It has invested more than \$1 billion in grants and programs to help ensure that young children are born healthy and raised in a loving and nurturing environment so that they grow up healthy, are eager to learn and reach their full potential.

On June 11, 2009, the First 5 LA Board of Commissioners approved a new, six-year strategic plan. In 2010, the Strategic Plan was amended by the Commission to include additional countywide initiatives. The Strategic Plan serves as a roadmap for directing First 5 LA funds towards innovative projects and services that will ultimately improve the lives of young children and their families, particularly those in high-need communities in L.A. County. The Plan outlines the direction in which funds will be strategically allocated over the next six-year period, beginning FY 2009-10, so that First 5 LA will have the greatest positive influence on direct services to strengthen families as well as the systems and environments in which young children and their families live, learn and play. These include medical and social service systems, as well as neighborhood housing, parks and schools. To a greater extent than in previous plans, the latest Strategic Plan is designed to build upon and bolster existing services and infrastructures in L.A. County that have already benefited from First 5 LA funding, as well as to improve their integration. In 2010, the Strategic Plan was amended by the Commission to include additional countywide initiatives. Over the first three years of this Strategic Plan, First 5 LA has invested more than \$370 million that address four priority goals:

- Children are born healthy
- Children maintain a healthy weight
- Children are safe from abuse and neglect
- Children are ready for kindergarten

To understand how First 5 LA's investments are designed to achieve these goals, the Commission approved a pathway outlining how change to these priority outcomes would be realized (see Appendix A). Most importantly, the Commission prioritized three key investment strategies through which positive change in children, families and communities in L.A. County can achieve these goals, as follows:

- **Family Strengthening** strategies that are direct services designed to provide intensive support to at-risk families, because families are the most fundamental context influencing the lives and outcomes of children;
- **Community Capacity Building** strategies focused on improving the quality of life in neighborhood or communities by partnering strategically with communities, and connecting and leveraging community assets; and,

- **Countywide System Improvement** strategies that improve the formal structures through which health and human services are provided in the County, as well as the less formalized systems, such as the economic system, the policy environment, and overall public will for early childhood issues.

This Fiscal Year 2009–2012 Accountability and Learning Report summarizes the progress made to date by the projects funded under the current Strategic Plan. The report describes the investments, the accomplishments made to date in helping families and children in the County, and the lessons learned. By describing its progress to date, First 5 LA can make mid-course corrections in order to enhance services and increase the likelihood that these investments will pay off by showing a positive return, over the remaining three years of the Strategic Plan.

For this report, First 5 LA investments have been grouped into clusters that represent common strategies, target populations, and desired outcomes, as follows:

- ***Perinatal Support:*** Healthy Births, Black Infant Health, Baby Friendly Hospitals, and Connecting Perinatal Risk & Service Systems;
- ***Physical and Mental Health:*** Healthy Kids, Oral Health & Nutrition Expansion and Enhancement Project, Oral Health Community Development, and Early Developmental Screening and Intervention;
- ***Parenting Support:*** Partnership for Families, First 5 LA Parent Helpline, One Step Ahead, and the Infant Safe Sleeping Campaign;
- ***School Readiness:*** School Readiness Initiative, Family Literacy, Los Angeles Universal Preschool, Family Place Libraries, and Early Development Instrument;
- ***Workforce:*** Family, Friends, & Neighbors, High School Recruitment, L.A. County ECE Workforce Consortium (includes Workforce Initiative, Gateways for Early Educators, Early Childhood Education Professional Learning Communities, Steps to Excellence Program and Partnerships for Education, Articulation and Collaboration in Higher Education), A Stipend Program in Support of ECE Excellence, Family Child Care Higher Education Academy, ECE Career Development Policy Project, Prenatal-to-three Workforce Development;
- ***Best Start:*** Metro LA Best Start (including Welcome Baby), Best Start Communities;
- ***Countywide Systems:*** Technical Assistance Institute, Community Investments, Public Affairs/Public Education, Community Opportunities Fund, Policy Advocacy Fund, Policy Agenda.

The following Accountability and Learning report focuses on key evaluation findings and learning opportunities to date that can help the Commission to make timely changes that improve implementation and quality for the next three years of the Strategic Plan. This report describes programs, their accomplishments as well as the lessons learned, that were funded over the past three years, covering FY 2009-10 through FY 2011-12. By summarizing the first three years, critical policy and allocation decisions may be made with deeper and timelier information. As a result, the Commission will obtain a higher level of accountability and can respond with greater flexibility to events as they unfold in the target communities and the county. This report describes the findings from evaluations conducted within the FY 2009-15 Strategic Plan Period. For some projects (e.g., 211, Healthy Kids) comprehensive outcomes and other evaluations were conducted during the prior strategic plan period and the direction was to continue with data collection on these and other projects that is more focused on performance monitoring.

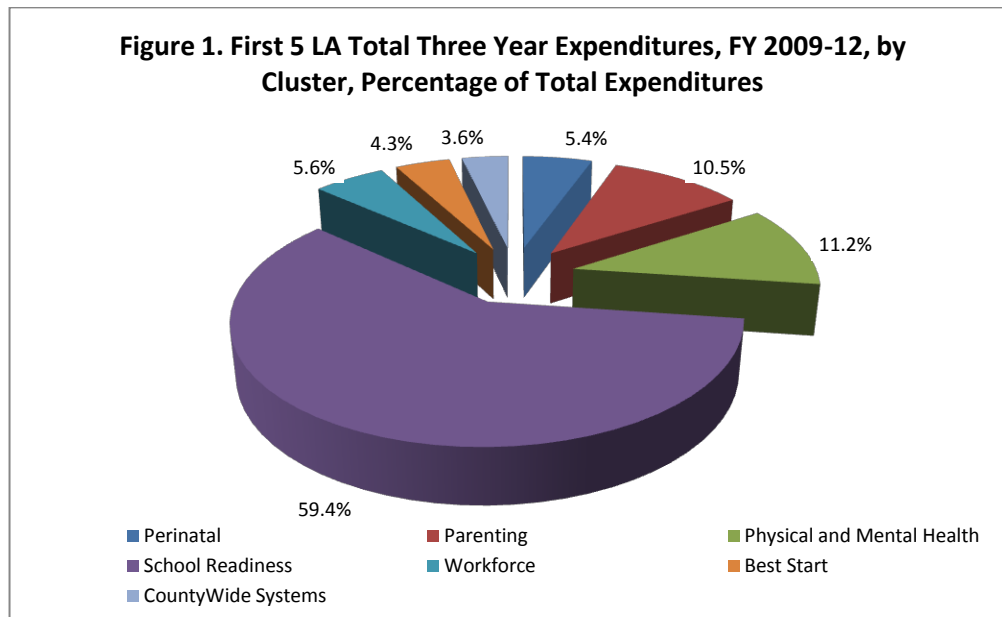
Summary of Expenditures from 2009 to 2012

Guided by the current Strategic Plan and three primary strategies that are expected to produce positive changes for young children and their families in L.A. County, First 5 LA funds were allocated across the clusters of investments as shown in Table 1. This table displays the total amounts expended within each cluster, by fiscal year and across all three years.

Table 1. Summary of expenditures by cluster, across three fiscal years, 2009–2012.

	FY 09-10	FY 10-11	FY 11-12	3-Year Total
Perinatal	\$6,842,560	\$6,597,821	\$6,259,020	\$19,699,401
Parenting	\$14,251,342	\$12,064,684	\$11,638,231	\$37,954,257
Physical and Mental Health	\$23,312,545	\$7,886,870	\$9,554,010	\$40,753,425
School Readiness	\$97,624,738	\$58,975,653	\$58,215,601	\$214,815,992
Workforce	\$4,004,545	\$6,909,576	\$9,390,537	\$20,304,658
Best Start	\$2,292,626	\$4,497,062	\$8,686,439	\$15,476,127
Countywide Systems	\$2,509,065	\$3,677,566	\$6,915,879	\$13,102,510
Total Expended	\$150,837,421	\$100,609,232	\$110,659,717	\$362,106,370

The pie chart below, Figure 1, displays the proportion of expenditures allocated within each cluster, as a percentage of total expenditures across the three years.



Over the three-year period, from FY 2009-10 through FY 2011-12, over half of all expenditures (59.4 percent) were directed towards the School Readiness cluster, followed by the Physical and Mental Health cluster projects, accounting for 16 percent of all expenditures, and then by the Parenting cluster, which accounted for another 10 percent of all expenditures. Thus, over three-quarters of First 5 LA investments were directed towards three clusters of programs. These investments implement two key strategies from the current F5LA Strategic Plan: Family Strengthening and Systems Improvement, with an emphasis on Family Strengthening. The projects involve primarily direct services to parents and children that will ensure that babies are born healthy, children are safe from abuse and neglect, and that children are ready for kindergarten.

When looking only at the last fiscal year, 2011-12, the allocation of expenditures reflects a growing emphasis on place-based and countywide strategies that is expected to increase over the next three years of the Strategic Plan. The expenditures directed towards Workforce Development, Best Start and County-Wide Systems investments increased almost three-fold, from \$6,421,342 in FY 2009-10 to \$25,006,714 in FY 2011-12. This occurred despite an overall 15 percent decline in total expenditures over the three years. These three investments implement the F5LA Strategic Plan strategies of Community Capacity Building and Systems Improvement, with an emphasis on place-based and countywide systems projects. These strategies primarily focus on communities and systems, rather than direct services to parents and children (although some direct services are funded under these strategies). Compared to direct services, these projects are more challenging to implement and require a longer time frame, which makes it more difficult to identify their impacts, that is, the return on investment of place-based and countywide strategies.

How many were served (Direct Services programs only)?

Table 2 summarizes the numbers of individuals, including children, parents, and early childhood education staff served for all three years of the current Strategic Plan.

Table 2. Numbers served in direct service programs, by cluster, across three fiscal years, 2009-12.

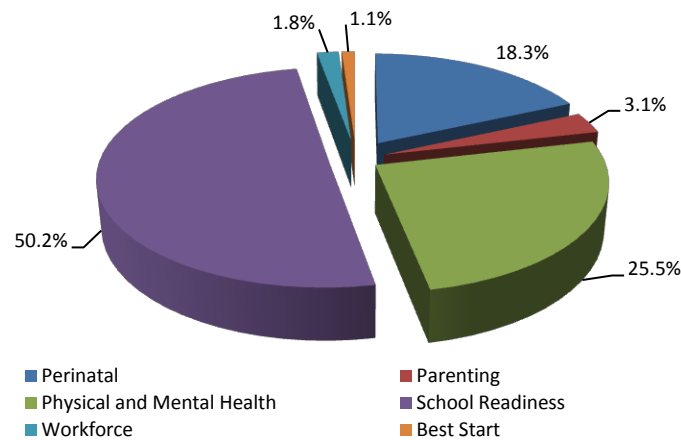
	FY 09-10	FY 10-11	FY 11-12	3-Year Total
Perinatal	7,033	30,568	42,254	79,855
Parenting	4,117	3,746	5,749	13,612
Physical and Mental Health	62,617	24,830	31,887	119,334
School Readiness	74,657	87,973	56,412	219,042
Workforce	1,677	2,066	4,014	7,757
Best Start*	562	14,988	7,431	22,981
Total Served**	150,663	164,171	147,747	462,581

* Direct services under the Best Start Cluster consist of participants in the Welcome Baby program.

** The total served across these three years does represent some duplication of participants since clients that were served in FY 09-10 would also be counted in FY 10-11.

Figure 2 summarizes the proportion of clients served for each cluster, as a percentage of the total number of clients served, across all three years, for direct service clients only. Direct service clients include parents, children, agency staff and professionals in the community who receive program services such as information and referral, home visits, other mental health interventions, as well as workshops and training sessions.

Figure 2. First 5 Total Served Across Three Years, FY 2009-12, by Cluster, Percentage of Total Served, Direct Services Only



In general, the numbers served during the first three years of the current Strategic Plan generally reflect the expenditure data, showing that children and parents in the School Readiness cluster, the investment with the largest amount allocated accounted for half (51 percent) of the total served, followed by the Physical and Mental Health (26 percent). The Perinatal cluster of investments did not account for a large allocation of expenditures yet accounted for 18 percent of children and parents served. This is because the Perinatal cluster includes the Baby Friendly Hospital initiative, which counts all mothers, and their babies, who deliver within the participating hospitals, along with the nurses and hospital staff who get trained. Since most costs are associated with policy change and nurse training, this is a relatively low-cost investment that reaches a high number of mothers. Finally, while the bulk of Best Start does not provide direct services, participation in its flagship Welcome Baby program accounts for 1 percent of the total served over the past three years.

Summary of Accomplishments and Learning from 2009 to 2012

During the first three years of the current Strategic Plan, investments in each of the clusters were largely successful in carrying out their missions and making progress towards their desired outcomes. The lessons learned over this period have important implications for the next three years of the Strategic Plan. Accomplishments and lessons learned for each cluster are summarized below (for more detailed information, please refer to each chapter).

Perinatal Support Cluster

The Perinatal Support Cluster of investments consists of the Healthy Births, Black Infant Health, Baby Friendly Hospitals, and Connecting Perinatal Risk & Service Systems

projects. This cluster of investments includes projects that support mothers and their children from the prenatal stage through two years post-partum. Within Los Angeles County, First 5 LA has targeted some of the most vulnerable populations with the Perinatal Support Cluster investments to help strengthen the existing skills and resources of families, and build upon that foundation in a way that helps families who most need assistance to achieve better birth outcomes and initiate breastfeeding following birth and delivery.

The Perinatal Support Cluster investments achieve these outcomes by either strengthening the family or improving the systems of care with which mothers that just gave birth and their families may use to support their and their baby's health. Through both direct service models and system change efforts, the investments in this cluster have made significant progress towards the strategic plan goals that babies are born healthy and that children maintain a healthy weight.

Overall, results of evaluations within this cluster reveal that the health of mothers and their newborns has been improved and the incidence of negative birth outcomes has been reduced, as follows:

- Lower infant mortality rates compared with comparison data (Healthy Births Initiative and Black Infant Health),
- Comparable rates of very low birthweight (Healthy Births Initiative),
- Higher breastfeeding initiation rates (Black Infant Health), but these were still lower than that for African American mothers in Los Angeles County,
- Higher proportion of babies born without birth defects (Healthy Births Initiative) compared to both the general population of births in Los Angeles County and births by African American mothers in the County, and
- Lower rates of preterm births (Black Infant Health) compared with African American women in Los Angeles County and nationally.
- Higher rates of breastfeeding (Healthy Births Initiative) than Los Angeles Mommy and Baby LAMB mothers

While the results do not provide definitive evidence, due to the evaluation designs, the preliminary evidence is consistent and mainly in the right direction.

At the same time, there are challenges for investments working to reduce racial disparities in maternal health and birth outcomes. For example, the proportions of babies born with very low birth weight and low birth weight were higher for those in the Black Infant Health program compared with the rates for African American mothers in Los Angeles County.

Physical and Mental Health Cluster

The Physical and Mental Health Cluster consists of the Healthy Kids, Oral Health & Nutrition Expansion and Enhancement Project, Oral Health Community Development, and Early Developmental Screening and Intervention initiatives. **These investments address two key Strategic Plan strategies: family strengthening and systems improvement.** This cluster addresses two First 5 LA strategic plan goals, i.e., babies are born healthy and children maintain a healthy weight.

These investments seek to improve the physical and mental well-being of young children and their families. Between FY09-10 and FY11-12, services funded under this cluster provided children with access to health insurance and dental services, and promoted screening of young children for the early identification of developmental delays, physical activity. Promising results from this cluster include:

- In FY11-12, outreach and enrollment efforts resulted in 2,087 children 0–5 enrolled in Healthy Kids.
- Preventive dental services including oral health screening, fluoride varnish application and prophylaxis were provided to over 53,000 children 0–5.
- Medical practices increased their developmental screening rates from 20 percent at baseline to over 85 percent. In comparison, in 2007, only 14 percent of California children ages 1–5 years received structured developmental screening¹,
- Use of a screening tool such as the ASQ or PEDS increased from 11 percent at baseline to 93 percent at follow-up.
- Rates of screening for maternal depression increased from 7 percent at baseline to 54 percent at follow-up.

It is anticipated that investments in this cluster — particularly those related to oral health, nutrition, vision, and physical play spaces — will yield greater results as projects funded after FY11-12 reach full implementation.

Parenting Support Cluster

The Parenting Support Cluster consists of the Partnership for Families, First 5 LA Parent Helpline, One Step Ahead, and the Infant Safe Sleeping Campaign initiatives. **These investments address two key investment strategies from the F5 LA Strategic Plan: Family Strengthening and Systems Improvement.** Employing direct service models and system change efforts, these investments are aimed at decreasing parents' social isolation, promoting their social connectedness, screening for postpartum maternal depression and offering information and referrals for substance abuse, child abuse and neglect, children's behavioral problems and other related issues. The

investments in this cluster made great strides towards strengthening families and improving systems, as follows.

- Partnership for Families (PFF) appears to have important short-term or “proximal” impacts by strengthening families and thereby reducing child maltreatment risk and protecting at-risk children from abuse and neglect.
- These meaningful changes were indirectly related to a reduction in the likelihood of re-referral to Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) for suspected maltreatment, by reducing the risk factors associated with re-referral. Overall, if families can become highly engaged in PFF, they have a good chance of improving their family functioning, and, as a result, improving child safety, preventing re-referral, child maltreatment, DCFS case opening, and removal of a child.
- Gains in parental engagement and behavior for Spanish-speaking and English Language Learner (ELL) children, particularly as a result of their exposure to a literacy and child safety program in addition to their experiences in early childhood education programs.

These findings suggest that progress was made, but that much more is required in order to meet the key First 5 LA Strategic Plan goal that children are safe from abuse and neglect.

The Parent Helpline was not evaluated for its impacts on the community or system of care as it had been in the previous Strategic Plan Period but recent call metrics suggest that efficiency was improved by reducing average call length, wait times and reduced number of abandoned calls.

The Infant Safe Sleeping Campaign completed its planning and was successfully launched during the past fiscal year. Based on focus groups during this year, the Infant Safe Sleeping Campaign garnered significant respect from community members due to the trust afforded to the L.A. County Coroner. Over the next three years, evaluation will identify the effects of this campaign on its target audience, that is, parents with babies.

School Readiness Cluster

The School Readiness Investments Cluster includes the School Readiness Initiative, Family Literacy, Los Angeles Universal Preschool, Family Place Libraries, and Early Development Instrument projects. These programs help support communities, schools, administrators, teachers, families and children to provide the best environments and opportunities for children to be ready for school. School Readiness investments provide supports and skills to families and their children so that the children are ready for

kindergarten. Some of these supports and skills come in the form of preschool, adult education, early literacy skills and family-focused literacy support.

The School Readiness cluster of programs addresses three key strategies from the First 5 LA Strategic Plan: Family Strengthening, Systems Improvement, and Community Capacity Building. The primary goal of the strategies in this cluster is that children are ready for kindergarten. Although the focus is on children's school readiness skills as they make the transition to kindergarten, there are also important changes expected to occur for parents that will herald improved school readiness skills of their children, such as literacy and language activities and engagement in their child's education.

The evaluation results across all investments in this cluster largely confirm that First 5 LA Strategic Plan strategies have made significant progress toward the goal that children are ready for kindergarten, as follows:

- In the Universal Preschool Child Outcomes Study (UPCOS), children attending LAUP early childhood programs were assessed in the fall and the spring of their preschool year on measures of expressive vocabulary, early writing, early math, social-emotional and approaches to learning. These fall-to-spring assessments in each preschool year were conducted for the past three years, from FY 2009-10 through FY 2011-12.
- Results across the past three fiscal years show that children made consistent year to year fall-to-spring gains in most of the key school readiness skill areas.
- By the third fiscal year, LAUP children appear to be doing better relative to their same-age peers in some skills than others, notably early math for children assessed in English and expressive vocabulary for children assessed in Spanish.
- Yet, compared with national norms these children are still behind their more privileged peers on some school readiness skills.
- Children also made consistent year to year fall-to-spring gains in their social-emotional development and approaches to learning.
- Parents with high levels of participation in parent-related activities offered by these investments increased the number of books in the home, spent more time reading to their children, and became more engaged in their child's education through greater contact and communication with the child's preschool and school.
- Results support a chain of events in which initial gains in parental attitudes and behavior changes lead to an improved home literacy environment, which in turn leads to improved school readiness skills by the children.

Two key lessons emerged from these findings:

- Preschool Program quality must be sufficiently high to trigger gains for children and parents, and
- Parents must have high levels of participation in parent-related activities in order for children to make gains in the school readiness skills.

The results demonstrate that the language, cognitive and social skills of children living in disadvantaged families in L.A. County can be improved. The consistency of year to year changes in most of the key school readiness skill areas suggest the possible contribution of LAUP early education and care programs to improving children's school readiness skills, parental involvement in children's education, and home environments.

Workforce Cluster

First 5 LA's portfolio of workforce investments consists of Family, Friends, and Neighbors, High School Recruitment, L.A. County ECE Workforce Consortium (includes Workforce Initiative, Gateways for Early Educators, Early Childhood Education Professional Learning Communities, Steps to Excellence Program and Partnerships for Education, Articulation and Collaboration in Higher Education), A Stipend Program in Support of ECE Excellence, Family Child Care Higher Education Academy, ECE Career Development Policy Project, and Prenatal-to-Three Workforce Development. These programs serve Early Care and Education (ECE) professionals, as well as students in high schools, community colleges and four-year universities. Strategies range from outreach to recruit new workers, to support for current and future ECE professionals to help them achieve academic goals, to training, coaching and mentoring.

This cluster of investments addresses the Strategic Plan strategies of Community Capacity Building and Systems Improvement. In terms of Community Capacity Building, participants in several of the workforce programs showed significant progress towards educational and professional success for students who want to work in the field of early care and education qualifications, as follows:

- Of all A Stipend Program in Support of ECE Excellence (ASPIRE) participants, 76 percent completed coursework with a "C" grade or better, 7 percent earned a degree and 21 percent achieved a new or upgraded permit.
 - ASPIRE participants showed increased knowledge about effective teacher-child interactions compared with a "wait list" comparison group.
 - Of the Workforce Initiative participants, 92 percent completed their educational plan, and 86 of participants completed coursework with a "C" grade or better, 15 percent achieved an AA/AS, 21 percent achieved a bachelor's degree, and 8 percent achieved new or upgraded permits.

- Project Vistas participants made progress towards their educational goals and they moved beyond their original goals of a basic child development permit to that of achieving an Associate of Arts and bachelor degrees.

As a result, the capacity in the Early Child Care Workforce has been improved among Early Care and Education (ECE) professionals, as well as students in high schools, community colleges and four-year universities. For those projects that focused on the First 5 LA Strategic Plan strategy of Systems Improvement, there were a number of indicators suggesting that successful collaboration, relationship-building, and communication have taken place. These changes may eventually produce improvements in the larger Workforce system and suggest that First 5 LA is becoming a leader on ECE workforce policy issues.

Best Start Cluster

The FY 2009-2015 Strategic Plan marked a significant evolution in First 5 LA's approach to grant making by committing a sizeable portion of funding to a place-based approach that seeks to improve the well-being of children in 14 high-need communities across Los Angeles County, called "Best Start" communities. The pilot Best Start community, Metro L.A., was the first to begin implementation of Best Start and is significantly more advanced in terms of this place-based initiative, compared with the remaining 13 communities, which are grouped as the "Best Start Communities."

This cluster of investments addresses the Strategic Plan strategies of Family Strengthening and Community Capacity Building. The Family Strengthening strategy focused on the Welcome Baby home visitation program. Preliminary results suggest that participation in Welcome Baby is associated with a number of positive outcomes for mothers and their babies, including:

- Infants who participated in Welcome Baby were more likely to be fed exclusively with breast milk during their first four months compared to those whose mothers did not participate.
- Many participants initiated exclusive breastfeeding and almost all initiated any form of breastfeeding while in the hospital.
- Many participants continued to exclusively breastfeed and the majority continued any form of breastfeeding during the first 9 months of the baby's life.
- Welcome Baby mothers had more learning materials in the home than mothers who did not participate in Welcome Baby.
- Gains made by Welcome Baby participants were those most strongly aligned with the goals and content of the Welcome Baby program.

For many families and community residents in Metro LA, Welcome Baby has become the concrete and tangible image of the Best Start model. Parents who participated in the program have consistently placed high value on this program and have been very satisfied with it. The successes to date of the Welcome Baby program suggests that First 5 LA has made substantial progress in meeting the Strategic Plan goals that babies are born healthy, and children maintain a healthy weight.

For the Best Start place-based initiatives focused on the Strategic Plan strategy of Community Capacity Building, there were a number of indicators from the pilot Metro L.A. Best Start experience suggesting that progress has been made, as follows:

- The successful formation of several task forces to develop activities for the community, such as a parent task force, a communications task force and a community mobilization task force
- Para Los Niños (PLN) continues to support the progress of the Community Governance Body in taking over the leadership and mobilization of residents
- PLN is also making progress in establishing community strategies for Metro L.A. despite staff changes
- Projects funded by the mini-grants were universally described as very positive and promising, were well-distributed across Metro L.A., focused on Best Start place-based goals, and reflected parents' primary concerns

Best Start Metro L.A. has made good progress in mobilizing the community members to take leadership roles but several lessons have been learned in the process. Investments that target Community Capacity Building are difficult to measure. Further, the positive effects may occur farther away from when the investments were implemented, because change at the community level takes time to become evident. As a result, it is difficult to detect positive changes and to associate these changes to the Best Start investment rather than to other factors occurring in these communities. The road ahead is long and challenging, and tangible, measureable benefits may only emerge once Best Start has become more established.

Countywide Systems Improvement

These investments cover the following initiatives/Department: Technical Assistance Institute, Community Investments, Public Affairs/Public Education, Community Opportunities Fund, Policy Advocacy Fund, and Policy Agenda. These initiatives are aimed primarily at supporting projects and partnerships in L.A. County that will leverage fiscal and non-fiscal resources between many stakeholders in order to improve the coordination of health and human services, both formal and informal, to improve efficiency and effectiveness of care or support for families with young children in L.A. County.

Countywide Systems Improvement investments by First 5 LA have shown some promising early results, although sometimes these are hard to detect and quantify. For several of these investments, evaluation efforts are currently underway and results are not yet available. Anecdotally, some progress towards improved countywide systems has been made, as follows:

- Increased awareness of elected officials of issues affecting children and families
- Strengthened First 5 LA's connection with existing public and private funders
- Improved organizational capacity of local grantees
- Helped a broad array of advocacy groups to improve their systems capacity (e.g., financial system, reporting system, etc.)
- Increased public awareness of existing and emerging issues facing children and communities
- Increased ability of organizations to diversify their funding sources and obtain larger amounts of funding from both new and existing sources

A number of lessons have been learned from these efforts to affect change in countywide systems. Building relationships are critical, as are sustaining the effects of training in the long-term, tailoring public awareness messages that are positive and actionable, and establishing the need for increased resources and flexibility.

The process of making changes in the larger system is a long, painstaking and sometimes frustrating task. By acting as a catalyst and convener of elected officials, agencies, non-profit organizations and the general public, First 5 LA can increase collaboration between sectors and systems and to achieve greater integration of services. This requires coordination at the level of the system among the stakeholders and key players with whom First 5 LA interacts. This difficult task is made all the more difficult in the current environment of reduced spending and tight budgets. However, it could be argued that this is the environment most suitable to systems change towards greater coordination and collaboration between larger countywide systems, agencies and informal resources.

Conclusions and Recommendations

With the 2009-15 Strategic Plan, First 5 LA joins a movement of public and private funders across the United States and internationally who are prioritizing funding to specific geographic regions. This “place-based” approach is designed to provide geographic parameters for direct services, and also to build the capacity of communities to create and sustain safe and nurturing places for children to grow. The findings from the first three years of this Strategic Plan reveal preliminary evidence suggesting that the health, development and well-being of children and parents in L.A. County have been improved, and that community capacity building and countywide systems improvement strategies

have taken root. Notwithstanding preliminary evidence of movement in the right direction, this report highlights critical issues in two areas that could potentially limit First 5 LA's effectiveness as an organization: lack of focus to the current set of investments and limitations related to implementation.

The lack of focus seems to stem from the fact that the strategic plan is not used as a roadmap to determine where First 5 LA's resources should be invested. Presently, First 5 LA's investments are not driven by a broad conceptual framework/approach that is linked to the current strategic plan and mutually understood by staff, commissioners and constituencies. Ideally, such a framework would help to prioritize and determine the investments that receive funding and where they fit within the broader portfolio. Instead, investments were classified after-the-fact.

The lack of a clear approach contributes to redundancy, overlap and duplication or the appearance of duplication among First 5 LA investments. It also limits opportunities to align similar initiatives and makes it difficult to identify these opportunities in the first place. So while there are good justifications for new programs, these justifications are based on the merits of the individual investments and do not appear to be based on a view that considers the overall mix of programs and where new program fit.

The number and complexity of investments also obscures issues that limit the effectiveness of individual investments. The results over the past three years highlighted in this report point to several key factors for improving quality and learning, particularly for those initiatives that have program models based on evidence-based practice and that provide direct services to parents, children or professionals in the community. Among these investments, there should be more systematic attempts to deliver the services closer to the planned model, that is, with high levels of fidelity so that participants receive the proper "dosage" that is likely to lead to the desired outcomes. Implementation should also include focused outreach to key populations to ensure high levels of enrollment and, ultimately, participation.

A related recommendation for maximizing the impact of First 5 LA investments is to better align service types and intensities with clients' varying levels of risk, using current Prevention Theory which refers to three levels of prevention: universal/primary, selective/secondary, or indicated/tertiary. Universal prevention consists of interventions directed at the entire population, whereas selective prevention targets individuals who demonstrate the risk factors associated with a particular disorder and indicated prevention is directed at individuals who have a clinical disorder and, therefore, require professional attention. Not only can the typology of prevention be used to classify and organize investments, to show the current mix and expenditures by prevention type, but it can also be used to help map out desired future allocations across the three levels of prevention.

Further, prevention theory can be used to identify instances when services and service intensities do not fit with the needs of the target population.

Finally, through intensive monitoring and accountability, First 5 LA can work with organizations that implement the programs to give them the greatest chance of producing the desired outcomes. There should be a clear connection between program monitoring and evaluation activities. There is a need for more uniform monitoring and reporting on client backgrounds and the types and intensities of services received so evaluations can identify whether the intervention produced positive outcomes, for whom and under what conditions. There is also a need for more evaluation, and for evaluations to use more rigorous designs in order to determine whether First 5 LA investments produced significant improvements in child, family and provider outcomes, and to ensure that any changes were due to the intervention and not to other extraneous factors.

A noteworthy conclusion of this report is that many of First 5 LA's investments require a longer time horizon in order to view their effects on communities, neighborhoods, institutions and the larger systems of care. This is consistent with what was envisioned by the Commission when the Strategic Plan was first approved. So while the results are promising, and suggest that systems serving families and children have been enhanced, without an accumulated body of evaluation evidence across a longer period of time, it is difficult to make conclusive statements about the impact of First 5 LA investments.